

Culture and Anarchy

Matthew Arnold



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"Culture and Anarchy" was probably Matthew Arnold's greatest work, and it can still be read with profit today. Mainly a reaction to the social and cultural uncertainties of mid-Victorian England, "Culture and Anarchy" attempts to analyze and solve the problem of anarchy and cultural uncertainty as Arnold saw it in this witty and articulate collection of essays. As the Encyclopedia Britannica puts it, "Arnold saw in the idea of "the State," and not in any one class of society, the true organ and repository of the nation's collective "best self." No summary can do justice to this extraordinary book; it can still be read with pure enjoyment, for it is written with an inward poise, a serene detachment, and an infusion of mental laughter, which make it a masterpiece of ridicule as well as a searching analysis of Victorian society. The same is true of its unduly neglected sequel, Friendship's Garland (1871)." "Culture and Anarchy" debates important questions about the nature of culture and society discussing what culture really is, what good it can do, and if it is really necessary. Arnold contrasts culture, which he calls the study of perfection, with anarchy, the mood of unrest and uncertainty that pervaded mid-Victorian England. "Culture and Anarchy" reinforces the continued importance of Arnold's ideas in the face of the challenges of multi-culturalism and post-modernism.



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